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Leader of the pack

Animals are notoriously troublesome when it comes to shooting films. They don't always obey the director, and when they do they often steal the show.

But 69-year-old French director Jean-Jacques Annaud - with two widely acclaimed films about animals under his belt, *The Bear* and *Two Brothers* - loves the challenge.

Annaud's latest film deals with wolves. Adapted from the Chinese bestseller *Wolf Totem*, by Jiang Rong, the film follows a young man's reflections on Han and Mongolian culture during his stay on the grasslands in 1967.

"I need to learn about wolves, their soul and culture," he says. "The wolf's world is amazing. They

share something in common with humans by living in a community led by a chief. Their organization and principles make them powerful."

"I don't see much difference in casting actors or animals," he says. "In both cases I need to figure out what they are thinking, and whether they like to communicate with me or not."

Annaud has been involved with *Wolf Totem* for almost three years. He worked with Andrew Simpson, one of the world's best wolf trainers, who has been working on a ranch close to Beijing for 15 months, training 11 2-year-old wolves, and five that are 6 months old.

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The animals will star in front of the cameras this fall. Annaud has completed scouting locations in Inner

Mongolia, met with actors and finalized the storyboard. He says he is shooting the film with the intention of expressing

something he has seen in Chinese people.

"Many people assume that Chinese do not care about the environment, but *Wolf Totem* is the most beautiful book about the environment I have read," he says.

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